

Action Plan for MBTA Communities

Section 1: Identification

- 1.1. MBTA Community Name: Grafton
- 1.2. Community Category: Adjacent
- 1.3. Multifamily Unit Capacity Requirement: 776
- 1.4. Does this municipality have any MBTA rapid transit stations within its boundaries: No
- 1.5. Does this municipality have any MBTA commuter rail stations within its boundaries: Yes
- 1.6. Does this municipality have any other MBTA transit stations that are located outside of its municipal boundaries that may have "developable station area" within them: Yes, Westborough's commuter rail station is about 1.5 miles from the closest border point in Grafton.
- 1.6a. Please list the MBTA transit stations that are located outside of the municipal boundaries but might have developable station area within them: N/A; not within .5 miles of Grafton's municipal boundaries and therefore, does not affect developable station area.
- 1.7. Please provide the name of the person filling out this form: Fiona Coughlan
- 1.7a. Title: Town Planner
- 1.7b. Email Address: coughlanf@grafton-ma.gov
- 1.7c. Phone Number: 508-839-5335
- 1.8. Please briefly describe other members of the core team developing the multi-family zoning district: Town Planner, Planning Board, and the Central MA Regional Planning Commission

Section 2: Housing Overview

- 2.1. Does this municipality have any established housing-related goals or strategies from municipal planning documents, such as a Housing Production Plan, Master Plan, or Economic Development Plan: Yes
- 2.1a. Please briefly describe any relevant strategies, goals, or objectives, and the work that has been done to date:

Established housing-related goals and strategies from the 2001 Comprehensive Master Plan:

Create a station district. Completed: The North Grafton Transit Village study was completed in 2017 and resulted in the creation of the North Grafton Transit Village Overlay District (NGTVOD), a 40R district. It is adjacent to the MBTA station, and there is now a mixed-use project underway that includes over 300 units of multi-family housing.

Pursue enactment of a mill village mixed-use amendment to the zoning by-law. Completed: four Village Mixed Use (VMU) zoning districts have been created, including one adjacent to MBTA station. The districts encourage multi-family development with or without associated commercial development, allowing multi-family by right up to a density that varies among the districts.

Allow townhouses in villages. This has been done to the extent of encouraging townhouses in VMU districts.

Increase affordable housing by using set-asides. Completed: The Fisherville Mill Smart Growth Overlay District and the NGTVOD require a minimum number of affordable units in new development and a deed restriction filed with the registry of deeds.

Continue to encourage flexible development. Completed. The Town supports flexible development or “cluster development” via a Special Permit in the agricultural, R-20, R-40, and Residential Multifamily districts in town. This promotes housing density and the preservation of open space.

Established housing-related goals and strategies from the 2018 Housing Production Plan:

Pursue mixed-use and transit-oriented development. This strategy is reflected in the creation of the NGTVOD, Fisherville Mill Overlay, and VMU districts noted above.

Review 40B Comprehensive Permit Proposals. There continues to be a process involving many Town parties, including the Affordable Housing Trust, Town Planner, Zoning Enforcement Officer, Town Administrator, and ZBA. The process ensures sound development and the upholding of state affordability standards.

Other planning includes the Route 30/Westboro Road Corridor Study, the North Grafton Transit Village Master Plan, the Housing Trust Action Plan, and a Low Impact Development Study. Each has been implemented to the extent feasible since publication, and major recommendations are reflected in recent amendments to the Town’s Zoning Bylaw.

2.2. Is this municipality currently working on any other planning for housing: Yes

2.2a. Please briefly describe the housing work underway:

An update of the Comprehensive Master Plan is currently underway. Housing will be a major part of that.

An update of the Housing Production Plan is currently underway.

The Town recently wrote a letter of support to the Central MA Regional Planning Commission for the creation of a Regional Housing Coordinator position.

Section 3: Preliminary Zoning Strategies

3.1. To the best of your knowledge, which of the following zoning strategies is this community most likely to use for compliance: A-D

- An existing zoning district or district that you believe already complies with the Section 3A Guidelines
- An existing zoning district or districts that must be amended to comply with Section 3A Guidelines
- A new 40R or other overlay zoning district
- A new base zoning district or districts

3.1a. Please identify and briefly describe the possibly compliant district(s), including any characteristics of existing development or transit options that make it suitable for use as this community's 3A-compliant district: Both the NGTVOD and the Fisherville Mill Smart Growth Overlay Districts are 40R districts, meaning they foster a range of housing opportunities and transit-oriented development, with mixed-use development that promotes compact design, preservation of open space, and a variety of transportation options, and enhanced pedestrian access to employment and nearby systems. The NGTVOD has the Grafton Commuter Rail Stop, and the Fisherville Overlay is serviced by the Worcester Regional Transit Authority (WRTA).

3.1b. Please select the changes that may be necessary for the existing district to comply.

- District boundaries
- Use schedule
- Dimensional regulations
- Parking requirements

The Chapter 43D Priority Development Overlay District (PDD) does not currently allow for housing, only commercial and industrial underlying uses. Dimensional regulations and parking requirements would need to be established to accommodate. There are other, more favorable, options to consider. The Campus Development Overlay does not currently allow for housing, only commercial, industrial, and research and development uses. Dimensional regulations and parking requirements would need to be established to accommodate. There are other, more favorable, options to consider.

The existing Residential Multi-Family (RMF) district would need to be amended to comply in terms of use schedule and dimensional regulations. Probable changes would be allowing multi-family units by right, up to the limits established in the 3A regulations. Currently all multi-family units in RMF require a special permit. If completed, parking parameters would need to be amended to allow for density and transit-oriented options. However, we would probably not choose to amend the entire RMF district to comply.

The four Village Mixed-Use districts (VMU) can be amended to comply by increasing the number of multi-family units allowed by right in a mixed-use development; we have not fully investigated this yet. This would ultimately affect parking and require modifications to promote walkability and density. Other options include removing the special permit requirement for: (1) multifamily without mixed-use; and (2) multifamily in excess of 8 units per acre for parcels less than 2 acres and within an existing structure(s), not to exceed 16 units per acre. These options must be considered more strongly by the Board and have not been fully investigated yet.

3.1c. Please briefly describe the potential district and location. We may consider a new overlay or 40R, probably on top of some existing RMF or at Centech Park, allowing multi-family by right. Based on activity in North Grafton near the commuter rail station, a new overlay or 40R in that area would be preferable. We are not prepared to describe definitively where we might create new base or overlay districts. We expect to consider such in conjunction with our master plan update.

3.1d. Please briefly describe the potential district and location. We may consider new base districts, converting existing RMF or possibly other residential to a new district allowing multi-family by right. We are not prepared to describe where or how we might create new base districts. We expect to consider such in conjunction with our master plan update.

3.2. What non-housing characteristics are important for this community to consider in its 3A zoning district: Walkability/pedestrian access, affordability, mixed-use, transit-oriented development, accessibility, street tree canopy, and municipal services.

Section 4: Action Plan Timeline

Public outreach – 1/23 -8/1/23 (with Master Plan)

Developing zoning – 8/1/23 – 12/31/23

Applying DHCD's compliance model to test for density and unit capacity - 8/1/23 – 12/31/23

Holding planning board hearings – 11/22 – 10/24 (Town Meeting)

Holding legislative sessions and adopt compliant zoning – 10/1/24 -10/31/24

Submit District Compliance application to DHCD – 11/1/24-12/31/24